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Provisional

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Friday, 27 July 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Yao Shaojun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/724)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/724)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/724, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

On 9 July, we met in this Chamber for an open debate on children in armed conflict (see S/PV.8305). The consensus among the representatives of Member States who spoke that day was clear — children in war must be protected. That sentiment was mirrored in the unprecedented support of States Members for resolution 2427 (2018). The time has come for the Security Council to move from words to action. That is why we suggested that today's meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria focus on the effects of the humanitarian crisis on children.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: I am pleased to be here together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict today. The appalling suffering that this war has wrought on Syria's children is truly unimaginable. Yet it is Syria's children who are the future of the country. Ensuring that their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled must be at the centre of all of our efforts.

The Secretary-General's Envoy briefed the Security Council comprehensively in closed consultations on Wednesday on the hostilities in south-west Syria. I agree with everything that he said and I do not believe that I need to repeat it. What I would like to say is that the United Nations and its partners have mobilized a response, which is reaching tens of thousands of people across much of the south-west. That has built on sustained efforts to preposition supplies through cross-border deliveries and now draws on programming from inside Syria, implemented through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in agreement with the Government. That has included the delivery of food from the World Food Programme for approximately 200,000 people across Dar'a governorate in recent weeks. United Nations personnel went to Al-Sahwa and Kahil in Dar'a governorate to assess needs and deliver food on 12 July.

On 15 July, United Nations personnel participated in a high-level mission to Nasib and Um Al-Mayazen in Dar'a, as well. However, an estimated 110,000 newly displaced people remain in Quneitra governorate in areas that have largely been cut off from sustained humanitarian assistance. Prepositioned supplies of shelter materials and basic household items for those people have now run out. That leaves displaced people exposed to soaring temperatures and desert winds. Access to water and sanitation is also of increasing concern, with deaths resulting from dehydration and contaminated water already reported. The response therefore now needs to be urgently scaled up across the south-west, and in Quneitra in particular.

Since November 2017, the total number of people in need of assistance in Aleppo and Idlib governorates has increased by close to 600,000 to a total of 4.2 million people. Of those people, half are in acute need owing to new displacement, exposure to ongoing conflict, reduced access to food or water and other factors. The recent arrival of thousands of evacuees from the south-west follows a pattern seen elsewhere earlier this year, which resulted in nearly 120,000 people being displaced into the north-west from March to May. With violence continuing and the risk of a further escalation looming, prepositioning of aid, together with efforts to scale up our ongoing response to immediate needs, is increasingly critical.

I have briefed the Council many times on the appalling suffering of the people of Fo'ah and Kefraya, who have been besieged by armed groups for years. On 16 July, an agreement was reportedly reached to evacuate the towns with approximately 120 buses transporting people to the Mahalej shelter in Aleppo. The United Nations was not party to the agreement, and we have not had access to the evacuees. However, efforts continue to provide the necessary emergency support, in coordination with Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local organizations.

The United Nations and its partners continue to respond to the needs of people displaced from Afrin district in Tell Rifaat subdistrict, Nubul and Zahra towns, and in surrounding communities. Protection remains a key concern across the area, including in relation to freedom of movement for those wishing to return to their homes and relatedly ensuring that housing, land and property rights are fully respected. We also note worrying reports of insecurity in Afrin town itself, including two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices being detonated late last month and killing 15 civilians and wounding 23.

Humanitarian needs remain high in eastern Ghouta, although there are also reports of markets beginning to function again and some other normalizing activities. Close to 10,000 people from eastern Ghouta — mostly men between the ages of 15 and 65 — are reported to remain in displacement sites across rural Damascus. In the north-east, returns to Raqqa city have continued, despite risks related to high levels of explosive hazard contamination. There are also very serious concerns about civilians trapped in areas held by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in the eastern part of Deir ez-Zor governorate, reports of civilian casualties in air strikes in Al-Sousa and Baghour Fukhani earlier this month, and hundreds of cases of diarrhoeal disease, including at least 12 deaths resulting from the consumption of contaminated water. Humanitarian demining in Raqqa city and Deir ez-Zor remains a key priority, together with ongoing efforts to scale up broader humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian situation at Rukban, on the Jordan-Syria border, remains dire, with reports of diarrhoea and dehydration in the camp. Discussions on the deployment of an aid convoy to the area continue.

Humanitarian organizations continue to reach millions of people throughout Syria. More than 3 million people received food this past month, but in many areas, needs have continued to increase, in particular in the south-west and north-west, as well as in Raqqa. Our efforts to keep pace with the rapidly evolving situation depend on support from many Member States. That includes financial contributions to the projects in the Syria humanitarian assistance response plan, aid provided by neighbouring Governments and in-kind donations such as those provided by France, which were facilitated by the Russian Federation earlier this week and distributed in Douma yesterday.

Unfortunately, the United Nations appeal for Syria this year remains substantially underfunded. Sustaining and increasing the confidence of donors depends on the ability of the United Nations and the humanitarian organizations, with which we work, first, to independently assess needs; secondly, to prioritize responses; and, thirdly, to provide assurance and evidence that help is reaching those in greatest need. That in turn requires safe, unimpeded and sustained access in line with the obligations of the parties to the conflict under international humanitarian law. The United Nations remains fully committed to working with the Syrian authorities and other stakeholders in that regard to demonstrate the principled nature of our collective effort and to ensure that we reach as many of the most vulnerable people as possible throughout the country.

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Gamba.

Ms. Gamba: First, I would like to thank the current President of the Security Council, Sweden, for giving me the opportunity to brief the Council today and share the most recent updates on the situation of children affected by the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. I concur with the statement delivered just now by my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism, created through resolution 1612 (2005) in 2005, collects information on the six grave violations against children in armed conflict situations. The Reporting Mechanism in Syria was established in 2013 following the listing of the Syrian Government for the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. Every year since then, there has been a tremendous increase in all grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict.

This specific Mechanism is unique in its set up, as it operates as a regional mechanism, gathering information from inside of Syria as well as from neighbouring countries, allowing for a broader scope in monitoring and capturing violations committed across Syria, while large parts of the country is inaccessible to the United Nations. However, I must stress that, although the cases documented by the Mechanism have all been verified by the United Nations, they represent only a mere fraction of violations committed in Syria as of today.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, the United Nations has verified through the Mechanism that more than 7,000 children have lost their lives or have been maimed as a result of this conflict. I must stress that this is the verified number alone; the unverified reports reflect numbers that go way beyond 20,000 child casualties. The Mechanism makes a distinction between reported and verified cases. Only verified cases lead to the listing of parties. The methodology of verification is carefully elaborated and requires a thorough triangulation of information procedures, which makes it a very strict mechanism that generates data that appears lower than figures in other monitoring initiatives and mechanisms of the United Nations. Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by all parties, of which now we tally over 88 — including the use of weapons prohibited under international law, aerial attacks, mortars and rockets, indiscriminate shelling and improvised explosive devices — have been used against civilian areas and civilian infrastructures and have had a deadly toll on children.

As Council members know, the Mechanism reports on six grave violations: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on hospitals and schools, abductions, and denial of humanitarian access. Over the years the Secretary-General has listed in the annexes of his annual report on children and armed conflict seven parties committing grave violations against children in Syria.

Since the beginning of 2018 alone — a period of six months — the Mechanism has verified over 1,200 violations against children. Of these, more than 600 children have been killed or maimed, more than 180 recruited and used, and more than 60 schools attacked, while over 100 attacks on hospitals and medical facilities or personnel have been all verified. Most of these verified grave violations have occurred in the last six months in the context of military surges by various parties in the areas of Afrin, Hama, Idlib, eastern Ghouta and Dar'a. Each of these surges has resulted in hundreds of thousands of displaced people, of which a vast proportion are children.

As war rages, detention of children for alleged association with armed forces and armed groups has exponentially increased. In 2018 alone, over 1,300 children are reportedly held by parties in the north-eastern part of Syria, of which the Mechanism could verify only seven cases since the beginning of the year due to the inaccessibility of the area and the relevant actors. In other parts of Syria, detention of children is also reported, and the Mechanism was able to verify more than 300 cases since 2014.

The figures emerging from the first six months of 2018 reflect large increases, as compared to previous similar reporting periods. For example, in the first quarter of 2018, there was an increase of 25 per cent in recruitment and use of children, and a 348 per cent increase in killing and maiming, both as compared to the previous quarter. In fact, the total number of grave violations for the first quarter marks a 109 per cent increase over the last quarter of 2017.

Attribution for these violations indicates that all recruitment and use in 2018 have been committed by non-State actors, while most killing and maiming figures are attributed to Syrian Government and pro-Government forces. Although figures for the beginning of 2018 include few verified cases of sexual violence and abduction, these are violations reported across all the years since the establishment of the Mechanism in Syria. For example, boys and girls have been sexually abused and exploited, sold as sexual slaves and forcibly married to fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Rape has been used as a means of torture, especially when children were being deprived of their liberty. Despite being underreported, cases of sexual violence against children in Syria also reflect the despicable nature of this conflict.

Attacks on schools and medical facilities have been one of the persistent features of the conflict in Syria. One in three schools are estimated to be out of use — either damaged, destroyed or used as a shelter or for military purposes. An estimated 2.1 million children alone are out of school inside Syria, due to a range of factors including insecurity, lack of facilities and quality education, poverty and displacement.

In the upcoming months, the Security Council-mandated country report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Syria will be published, covering almost five years of the conflict. The findings of the Mechanism over that period of time are utterly unsettling. I am deeply disturbed by the stories of children born and raised throughout this conflict, children who have never seen peace in Syria, children who have suffered repeatedly from all types of violations in their homes, communities, schools, detention centres and in refugee and internally displaced persons settings. We have to think that these children are in severe psychosocial distress. They do not know the meaning of the word "peace".

The violence Syrian children have been subjected to, and are still being subject to — as well as the pain they and their families have faced throughout these years of crisis — is simply unacceptable. Given the dynamics and violations occurring against children this year, I am especially concerned about children deprived of their liberty and the conditions of detention of children allegedly associated with parties to the conflict. These children must be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law.

I call on all parties involved in the conflict in Syria to comply with applicable obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to give civilian child-protection actors access to children deprived of liberty for association or alleged association with armed forces and groups. I further call on all parties to the conflict in Syria to take immediate measures to ensure that their military operations are conducted in full compliance with international law, including through respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Humanitarian access must be granted to all children in all locations in Syria, including through the implementation of humanitarian corridors and pauses for the delivery of humanitarian assistance that are indispensable for their survival and development, without any discrimination. This standard should also be applicable to returnees.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that children continue to be disproportionately affected by the armed conflict in Syria. It is essential that the Security Council does everything in its power to put pressure on parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international law and ensure that children are no longer subject to grave violations of their rights. Parties to conflict must take immediate, concrete and effective action to prevent child casualties during the conduct of hostilities, including by immediately ceasing to use means and methods of warfare that are inherently indiscriminate or disproportionate in nature and ensure that children deprived of their liberty be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law.

There is clearly no alternative other than peace to stop the increasing violations against children in Syria. We must make peace a priority and, in the pursuit of that peace, we must ensure that all peace negotiations include children at the centre of the discussion. Nowhere it is more important to consider children as an indispensable part of peace processes than in the Syrian conflict. There will be hundreds of thousands of children who will need assistance and we must prepare to meet their needs.

The prolonged exposure to war has immediate and major detrimental effects on the psychosocial well-being of children. If left untreated, the long-term negative consequences will affect them for the rest of their lives. In that regard, recalling the recently adopted resolution 2427 (2018), children affected by the conflict must be able to access protection programmes designed to meet their needs in an integrated and comprehensive approach to mental health and psychosocial support, including the specific needs of children with disabilities. The international community must prioritize funding and provision for quality education for all children at all levels, from the initial stages of child development through to vocational training for youth. No one must be left behind, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been robbed of their most important developmental years.

It is time for the children of Syria to believe in their own future and to learn what peace means. It is time for them to retake the childhood that was taken away from them. It is time for them to stop being victims and become game changers in the restoration of normality in peace and justice. They have been used and abused by, in and for this armed conflict for far too long.

The President: I thank Ms. Gamba for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the presidency of the Council for proposing to focus today's meeting on the plight of children in Syria. Let me also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for their briefings and for the relentless efforts of the humanitarian workers in all areas of conflict.

I will focus my remarks on two key points: the humanitarian situation and Syria's children.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, as the Syrian crisis enters its eighth year, our Syrian brothers are facing a humanitarian catastrophe and extremely difficult economic and social situation. Thousands of Syrians are subjected daily to the most heinous and blatant violations of international law and international human rights law as a result of the ongoing cycle of violence, which to date has claimed the lives of no fewer than 400,000 people, including a large number of women and children.

We have followed with great concern the military escalation in south-western Syria over the past few weeks, which has led to the displacement of almost 300,000 people and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation of innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly. Although this number has decreased following the return of some refugees to their homes, many of them remain in dire need of urgent humanitarian assistance. We share the Secretary-General's concerns with regard to ending cross-border humanitarian operations in south-western Syria as a result of the recent escalation. We underscore the need to providing humanitarian assistance to all those in need in south-western Syria as soon as possible, lifting all restrictions on international organizations and agencies and delivering assistance to those in need throughout Syria.

The war in Syria, which began in 2011, has created the largest refugee crisis in modern history. The Syrian people have been left with no choice but to escape or to live under the stress of armed conflict. It has led to more than 5 million Syrian refugees abroad, including 2 million children, and nearly 6 million internally displaced persons, 2.5 million of whom are children. That represents a total of 11 million Syrians. We underscore that the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes must be safe, voluntary and dignified.

Undoubtedly, the children of Syria continue to pay the highest price of a war that has been going on for eight years in their country. They have been robbed of their innocence, dreams and their inherent right to life and dignity. The suffering of Syria's children is a stigma for the international community. Millions of children know only war. They have experienced only war since they were born. They remain the most vulnerable and the most in need of protection. Therefore, we must not disappoint them because they are the future of Syria.

There are more than 5 million children in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance. As Ms. Virginia Gamba stated a while ago, children in Syria are subjected to grave suffering as a result of the ongoing conflict. They are killed, abducted, kidnapped, recruited, tortured and subjected to other tragedies. The conflict has affected almost 2 million children, who have not even received basic education, which could result in a whole generation losing their right to learn.

In 2017, as Ms. Gamba just stated, 67 schools and more than 108 medical facilities were targeted. This information is included in the report on children and armed conflict. We strongly condemn the systematic targeting of vital and basic facilities, including schools, hospitals and medical facilities. They represent a red line, as underscored in resolution 2427 (2018). This resolution, which was adopted unanimously at the beginning of the current month and was sponsored by Kuwait and 97 States Members of the United Nations, is explicit and clear. It condemns the attacks on schools and hospitals, and calls upon all parties to the armed conflict not to thwart children's access to education and health services. We urge all parties to the Syrian crisis to implement this resolution. Furthermore, resolution 2401 (2018) is yet another example of a blatant violation pertaining to Security Council resolutions. Although it was adopted unanimously and called for a ceasefire without delay and the delivery of humanitarian access to besieged areas, that resolution, unfortunately, was not implemented.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait reaffirms that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. We must redouble our efforts to end the suffering of an entire people — the brotherly Syrian people, who are rich in history, culture and civilization. We must end the repercussions of a crisis that is destroying the region

and the world at large, by supporting a political solution in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015), and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). This would lead to a comprehensive settlement, agreed by all components of the Syrian people, in order to meet their legitimate aspirations and achieve the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative Gamba for their detailed and disturbing briefings and for their important work on Syria.

The United States condemns the attack that took place earlier this week in Syria's Al-Suwayda province, for which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham has claimed responsibility. The barbaric attack killed scores of civilians and we send our sympathies to the families of the victims.

Civilians, in particular children, continue to bear the brunt of ongoing violence in Syria. Each month, Mr. Lowcock briefs us on desperate civilians caught up in military offensives and the thousands who are denied access to the most basic necessities, including life-saving aid. The most recent military campaign in the south-west is yet another dark chapter in Syria's tragic story. This month, Special Representative Gamba has provided us with an even closer look at the misery. It is clear that Syria's children have experienced an almost unimaginable level of suffering and trauma that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

The statistics cited here and in the monthly reports on Syria should not be misinterpreted. Yes, the number of besieged areas has been reduced to zero, but not because the regime lifted sieges. Instead, it is because it mercilessly followed through with its surrender-or-starve campaign. Similarly, the number of Syrians living in hard-to-reach areas is down from just over 2 million last month to 1.5 million in July — not because the regime is allowing more access, but because it has taken more territory by force. Sadly, more than 13 million people in Syria still require humanitarian assistance, and at least 6 million of those are children.

In south-west Syria, the regime's military offensives since 17 June have displaced more than 325,000 civilians, approximately half of whom are children. Yet, humanitarians are largely unable to reach those vulnerable populations and supplies are dwindling. Even more concerning is the fact that this loss of humanitarian access in south-west Syria includes the halting of United Nations cross-border aid deliveries demanded by the Council, most recently in resolution 2393 (2017).Nothing about the regime's failure to facilitate humanitarian access has changed since last month's Council meeting (see S/PV.8296). Instead of placing the needs of its own population first, the regime continues to weaponize humanitarian assistance and withhold access as a tool to force reconciliation in areas formerly held by the armed opposition.

We call on the Syrian regime and its Russian allies to allow the United Nations to resume cross-border convoys from Jordan and to facilitate delivery of cross-line assistance from Damascus to people in need, in line with the Council's previous resolutions on the matter. For the 800,000 people dependent on life-saving cross-border assistance, United Nations operations need to continue.

Turning to Idlib, the Syrian regime and its supporters have continued their aggressive actions and are building up their military forces for their next major offensive. The United Nations dire warnings have been clear and unmistakable — a Syrian regime military campaign in Idlib, akin to what we saw in eastern Ghouta and Aleppo, would result in a disastrous humanitarian crisis. The Council urgently needs to put measures in place to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access in Idlib, where hundreds of thousands of people are at risk.

The United States will once again put on record that United Nations humanitarian convoys are welcome at any time in Rukban. We welcome this assistance and are ready to do everything we can to facilitate it.

In Raqqa, removing unexploded ordinance is one of our top priorities; it is a critical first step for humanitarian and stabilization assistance. To date, coalition-funded explosive hazards removal teams have cleared more than 20,000 explosive hazards from 15.5 million square meters of territory in Manbij, Tabqa and Raqqa cities and trained over 300 Syrian nationals to conduct marking, survey and clearance up to international humanitarian mine action standards. The task is not easy, but it is vital to ensure that Syrians can return home safely.

The United States continues to support refugee returns when they are safe, voluntary and dignified. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

assesses that it is not yet safe for large-scale refugee returns in Syria. We also remind the Council that the cessation of violence is a critical element for planning successful large-scale refugee returns. Russia is still not upholding its commitment to maintaining a de-escalation zone in south-western Syria. If Russia is serious about its concern for refugees and other displaced Syrians, it should work with the Syrian regime to stop the violence and allow unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need.

In conclusion, the positive developments are few and far between, but we must find light where we can. We are glad that children and their families in two previously besieged parts of Idlib were finally able to depart for safer areas and no longer face being cut off from the basic elements of survival. Now, we must find a way to protect the other children in Idlib in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for their briefings, which are always very enlightening, but unfortunately also bleak, as well as for their tireless efforts and those of their teams.

Civilians continue to be the victims and targets of the regime's military strategy. The retaking of south-west Syria is another episode in the humanitarian disaster that has been unfolding in Syria since 2011. What remains of the de-escalation zone and the commitments undertaken by the guarantors of the ceasefire to reducing violence and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law?

In Idlib, the threat of a regime offensive that has been publicly announced by Bashar Al-Assad is a looming tragedy for the 2.2 million people present there. Such an offensive would also be a source of further destabilization not only for northern Syria and Turkey, but also for the entire region, specifically as a result of the dispersal of terrorist fighters to which it will inevitably give rise. A new, bloody offensive in Idlib will open chapter two of the Syrian tragedy — that of a regional spillover of the conflict.

In that context, I would like to highlight three key priorities that should serve as a guide for our action: the protection of vulnerable people, ensuring humanitarian access, and achieving a lasting political solution in Syria with the support of the United Nations.

The first priority is the protection of all vulnerable populations. I would like to echo Ms. Gamba's remarks and stress the seriousness of the violations against children in Syria, which has made it the most dangerous country for children in 2018. Tens of thousands of children have been killed or wounded since the outbreak of the conflict as a result of indiscriminate shelling by the regime. An entire generation has been out of school, with consequences in terms of social and professional integration and potential radicalization. The recruitment and use of children, in particular by terrorist groups, such as Da'esh, continue to increase. Currently, 5.3 million children need humanitarian assistance. There are tangible and immediately operational measures and we call on all parties to the conflict to urgently adopt them. It is important to refrain from targeting schools and school infrastructure and to protect civilian and residential areas in the conduct of operations.

I also want to revisit the urgent need to ensure the security of humanitarian workers. It is important to ensure that humanitarian workers in areas that have been retaken by the regime will be protected and that humanitarian services for the people in those areas will continue. We are heartened by the successful rescue operation of a number of White Helmets, who have saved many lives at the risk of their own and have been constantly targeted by the Syrian regime. Not all White Helmets have been evacuated and those remaining in Syria are now under serious threat. We must secure safety guarantees for those individuals and their families and ensure that they are not the target of retaliation by the regime.

I also want to raise the issue of the protection of journalists and their families trapped in Syria. As the Council is aware, this issue is a priority for France. I call for further collective mobilizing to that end.

With regard to refugees, the conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return have not been met. Their safety is not ensured because the regime continues to violate all ceasefires. Many of them are exposed to abuses or are forcibly recruited into the regime's army upon their return. Law No. 10, which makes population displacement irreversible and is part of the regime's demographic engineering strategy, constitutes a major obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons. Like the European Union (EU), we demand its repeal, as well as indemnities and substantive work on property restitution and recruitment. I would like to point out

that this question is not limited to a legal text, because Law No. 10 merely formalizes and systematizes the regime's practices.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the priority of humanitarian access, which continues to deteriorate in Syria. The Syrian regime continues to impose unacceptable obstacles to the delivery of aid, in violation of international humanitarian law. Letting that indispensable aid through everywhere, especially in hard-to-reach areas, is an obligation of all parties. It is intolerable to deprive populations of vital aid of which they are sorely lacking, whether in Idlib, eastern Ghouta or Quneitra.

We are particularly concerned about the situation in the south of the country, where no cross-border convoy from Jordan has been arranged since 25 June. Only aid from Damascus remains, but it is distributed exclusively in areas under the control of the regime. We therefore call on the actors with influence on the regime to ensure that cross-border convoys via Jordan are restored and secured as soon as possible. All convoys must be able to move safely and unhindered throughout the country, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law.

It is imperative that the entire population in need receive humanitarian aid on the basis of a neutral evaluation conducted by the United Nations. France has fully mobilized to meet that challenge. It is with that objective in mind that President Macron and President Putin decided to undertake a joint project to deliver humanitarian aid to Douma, in eastern Ghouta, where the needs of the population remain considerable several months after the end of the fighting. Forty-four tons of medical equipment and basic necessities were transported from France to Syria via a Russian plane during the night of 20-21 July. The distribution of non-food items to beneficiaries took place yesterday, 26 July, in partnership with the United Nations. Medicine and the medical equipment were received by the Douma health centre.

In that context, I commend the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations agencies, which have spared no effort to ensure that the people of Ghouta receive that aid under the best possible conditions. That result remains modest in relation to the magnitude of the needs, but it makes a real difference to the people of a particularly hard-hit area, which that aid would undoubtedly not have reached otherwise. More needs to be done, as Mark Lowcock rightly pointed out.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation will never be addressed in a sustainable manner without a breakthrough in the United Nations-led political process. Despite its reconquests, the regime has achieved nothing but victories without peace. As resolution 2254 (2015) recalls, without a political transition, Syria will remain a lasting factor of regional destabilization, for want of the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, in safe and dignified conditions; the financing of reconstruction by multilateral donors; and national reconciliation that makes it possible to stamp out terrorism, the presence of foreign militias and the persistence of a civil war mindset. On these various points, the deadlock will persist unless we advance the political process.

In that regard, the pursuit of the regime's military strategy undermines the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to bring the actors in the conflict closer together and relaunch the political process around the formation of a constitutional committee. It is imperative that the regime's supporters exert the pressure necessary to ensure an environment conducive to the continuation of the consultations launched by the Special Envoy.

In the same way, I repeat here clearly before the Council that we will not take part in the reconstruction of Syria without the effective implementation of a political transition, with a genuine constitutional and electoral process. That is sine qua non for the stability of the country and our contribution towards financing reconstruction. Otherwise, there is no reason why France and the EU should commit themselves to financing reconstruction. To ensure the country's long-term stability through a negotiated political solution, we are sparing no effort to encourage concrete convergence with key players in the conflict, particularly those in Astana and the Small Group.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on a very this important subject with these impressive briefers. We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative of the Secretary General Gamba for their sobering briefings.

Frankly speaking, I was shocked to hear yet again about the terrible suffering of Syrian children. Children should be protected, including in times of war, yet such

protection is completely lacking in the Syrian conflict. We express our strong support for the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. We are grateful for the extremely valuable work that the Special Representative and her team have done regarding Syria — valuable work in spite of the lack of access and cooperation from the Syrian regime. It is deplorable that the Syrian regime ignores its international obligations, even when it comes to the protection of children. We expect the upcoming country report to address those issues in clear terms, and we support the idea of more frequent country reports. Today we are talking about the humanitarian situation in Syria, but let us not forget the fate of the 6.5 million refugees who have been forced to flee their country.

In my statement I will address three points: first, the situation in southern Syria; secondly, the situation in Idlib; and thirdly, the continuing violation of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles in Syria.

First, we express grave concern about the violence in southern Syria. Hostilities in the past few weeks have been marked by civilian casualties, attacks on schools and hospitals and the rapid displacement of around 180,000 individuals. We strongly condemn the recent series of suicide attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. As Mr. Staffan de Mistura told us on Wednesday, 180,000 civilians have become internally displaced as a result of the ground and aerial offensives of the Syrian regime and its allies in the south-west. Some of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) near Quneitra remain without shelter and are exposed to the sun, in temperatures reaching up to 40°C. Humanitarian partners based in Damascus have not been granted access due to a lack of necessary approvals by the regime. Cross-border humanitarian operations are also suspended.

The Syrian regime should respect international humanitarian law and provide sustained access for humanitarian actors and protection to all people in need, including IDPs located near the Golan border. We call on all parties to provide cross-border humanitarian convoys with the necessary security guarantees, including the relevant guarantors of the de-escalation zone, as it was called at the time. Cross-border aid delivery remains of paramount importance and must be facilitated where it is the most effective, or the only way to reach those in need.

Let me welcome the humanitarian operation that has led to the evacuation of a group of White Helmets and their family members from southern Syria. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is currently looking into the possibilities of a contribution to the resettlement plans.

We pay tribute to the selfless work of the White Helmets in all parts of Syria, who have saved countless Syrian civilian lives. Let me underline that all sides of the conflict should accept and protect all aid workers. It is deeply disturbing that instead, many have to fear for their lives because of the advance of Syrian troops and their allies. We regret that the White Helmets in particular have been targeted both on the ground and here at the United Nations, by slanderous accusations. Let me also underline the point made by our French colleague about the need to guarantee the safety of journalists in conflict.

That brings me to my second point — the situation in Idlib. Currently, the Idlib region is completely surrounded by forces of the Syrian regime. We are deeply concerned about the fate of the 2.3 million civilians in Idlib, of which approximately 1.3 million are displaced persons from elsewhere in Syria. They are under constant threat of air strikes and of hostilities between armed groups. An assault by the Syrian regime will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe with grave regional consequences.

Let me stress that the civilians in Idlib are neither terrorists, nor combatants. Civilians must be protected during armed conflict. Medical facilities need to be protected too, as the Council so clearly underlined in resolution 2286 (2016). The Astana guarantors have a particular responsibility to work on arrangements to prevent further human suffering, protect civilians and provide a non-violent exit to this growing tragedy. In our opinion, the Council should send a very strong signal to the regime and its allies not to attack Idlib. We regret that we were unable to agree on such a signal last Wednesday in our meeting.

That brings me to my third point — the continuing violations of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles in Syria. Years of bombardments, sieges and deprivation by the Syrian regime have in the past months led to the regime taking over several severely damaged areas. Even now, United Nations access to those areas is consistently denied by the regime. The Organization is often banned from inter-agency convoys, meaning that United Nations coordination and monitoring of the

distribution of aid is hampered. As a consequence, aid is not being delivered to those who need it most.

Let me give an example. Between January and April, a mere 22 per cent of aid in territories controlled by the Syrian regime was delivered to those in acute need. That is simply unacceptable. We therefore call on the Syrian regime, the Russian Federation and Iran to immediately allow unimpeded and sustained access for all humanitarian actors. If the regime continues to obstruct the ability of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to work from Damascus, it effectively blocks the possibilities for principled, evidence-based humanitarian action in Syria. As a consequence, many more innocent people and many more innocent children will suffer.

In conclusion, let me stress the need for accountability for the ongoing crimes committed in Syria by all parties. We will continue our efforts in that regard both on and off the Council. We call on those with influence to ensure that Syrians in need can be helped by the United Nations. Furthermore, they should convince the regime to reconsider Law Number 10, as stressed by our French colleague. Complying with international humanitarian law and providing humanitarian access remain essential to improve the conditions of the suffering Syrian civilians. That particularly applies to the suffering Syrian children, as Virginia Gamba so clearly described. Respect for international humanitarian law is key if we want to prevent a repetition of eastern Aleppo, eastern Ghouta and Dar'a.

Finally, we call for assurances that humanitarian workers in areas that have recently changed control will be protected and that humanitarian services for the people in those areas will continue to be available.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and thank Mark Lowcock and Virginia Gamba for the important work they have been carrying out and for the extremely troubling information they have just provided us. The picture they have painted is bleak. The Syrian conflict continues to claim civilian victims and features scenarios where the risk of new escalation is alarming. Humanitarian assistance is very limited. International law and international humanitarian law continue to be violated with impunity.

Peru deeply regrets that situation and is particularly concerned about the vulnerability of internally displaced persons and refugees, particularly in the southwest of the country. We note that more than 13 million people require humanitarian assistance in Syria, and more than 5 million are children. We underline the ethical and legal commitment of the Syrian authorities and other influential actors on the ground to facilitating full, unimpeded and immediate access to humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and other relevant agencies.

We also stress the need to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of Syrian citizens to their homes and businesses, in accordance with internationally agreed standards. That requires political will, confidence-building and resources. We believe that the support of the international community and the participation of the United Nations is critical.

We note with concern the negative consequences that the implementation of Law 10 would have on millions of displaced persons and on the building of sustainable peace in Syria. Similarly, we are alarmed by the risk of an escalation of violence in Idlib, which could lead to a new hell on Earth. We consider it of the utmost importance to prevent a new humanitarian tragedy, and we stress that the fight against terrorism in no way justifies the violation of human rights or international humanitarian law.

It is important to bear in mind that children are particularly vulnerable. Death, orphanhood, malnutrition, injury, illness, trauma, neglect, destruction of schools — these are the consequences of violence for millions of children in Syria. Many of them have known only conflict and forced displacement. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/724), in 2017 alone, there were almost 3,000 serious violations of children's rights, more than in the previous year. And the number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children for military purposes increased by 13 per cent, mostly in Aleppo, Hama and Idlib provinces.

In view of that, we would like to highlight the timely and necessary emphasis placed by the Swedish presidency on the responsibility to protect them. That means providing them with a peaceful environment in which to recover and develop a life free from violence of all kinds, as part of a comprehensive strategy to resolve the conflict and maintain peace.

I conclude by underlining the particular responsibility of this Council, in line with recent resolution 2427 (2018) on children and armed conflict,

In particular, we emphasize the need to promote rehabilitation activities for recruited children, with a view to facilitating their reintegration into society and building sustainable peace in Syria.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting. I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative Gamba for their illuminating updates on the humanitarian situation in Syria and the impact of the current conflict on children.

We take advantage of this open informative session to condemn in the strongest terms the series of suicide attacks carried out by the Islamic State on the morning of 25 July in many villages of Al-Suwayda province. Those latest attacks, resulting in more than two hundred deaths and a hundred injured, must not undermine the efforts to return to sustainable peace and stability in Syria.

Government forces and local militias, which control much of the country, particularly in the southern region, must step up their presence along the whole eastern administrative border of Suwayda and take provisional control measures with regard to citizens arriving in this area. However, my country's Government wishes to express to the Council its great concern at the situation of insecurity prevailing in the south-west part of the country, given that the clashes, following the implacable logic of military operations, are resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries as well as the massive displacement of civilians, and are also preventing United Nations entities from sending cross-border humanitarian supplies owing to the lack of security.

The continuing airstrikes against medical and educational facilities and personnel in Idlib, the high levels of contamination by explosives in Raqqa, the presence of numerous improvised explosive devices and the significant number of civilians who remain in camps for displaced persons in eastern Ghouta all attest to the precarious humanitarian situation. It is therefore vital that United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners spare no effort and create synergies to provide assistance to as many people in need as possible, and also that the parties of the conflict guarantee safe, sustained and unimpeded access to inter-institutional humanitarian convoys, in compliance with resolution 2401 (2018).

Given this situation of devastation and anguish, Equatorial Guinea cannot but join its voice to those calling for the defence and protection of the rights of children in armed conflict, particularly in Syria, the issue with which we are dealing today. This was made clear with the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) during the open debate held on 9 July (see S/PV.8305). There is a need to tackle factors such as the lack of humanitarian assistance, which exposes Syrian children to a greater risk of violence and exploitation, including child labour, recruitment and forced marriage. This prolonged conflict has without a doubt had a significant impact on children throughout the country and could cause post-traumatic stress disorder and toxic stress, which can lead to long-term physical and mental damage if not appropriately treated.

Air strikes against schools and educational personnel and the use of schools for military purposes also significantly affect children, increasing their risk of suffering and dying from vaccine-preventable diseases. In order to remedy this situation, the parties to the conflict must consistently abide by their commitment to protecting the rights of children.

The information provided by Ms. Gamba is very significant and should induce all parties to the conflict to reflect very deeply. We have said on many occasions that this conflict cannot have a military solution. But even if there is an insistence on not reaching agreement, the parties must at least respect humanitarian law and use force proportionately so as to save the lives of the most vulnerable, that is to say, children.

Let me conclude by expressing the firm support of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea for the recent joint initiative of the Russian Federation and the French Republic aimed at providing humanitarian assistance to the inhabitants of eastern Ghouta and Douma. This initiative is the result of a coordination meeting between the leaders of both countries held in May, in St. Petersburg, and aims to provide first-aid medical teams for more than 500 people with serious injuries and medical supplies to treat 15,000 minor injuries. This supplements the assistance targeted at meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of eastern Ghouta. This Franco-Russian cooperation deserves our full attention and praise, because it shows how, with a little political will, the countries of the Security Council with influence upon the parties to the conflict can, if they so wish, reach an understanding and work to ensure that the conflict is resolved peacefully.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I should like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Special Representative Virginia Gamba for their impressive briefings. We deeply appreciate their dedicated service.

Even as we meet today to discuss once again the humanitarian situation in Syria, military logic, unfortunately, continues to drive developments on the ground. We still face unceasing and widespread violence as well as violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. The most striking examples of this were the recent events in the south-west de-escalation zone, where more than 55,000 children remain deprived of access to humanitarian assistance, and a total of 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have fled the recent wave of violence.

Taking into consideration those recent events, we strongly condemn the intensification of military operations. Unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access must be secured, as called for in resolution 2401 (2018). Unfortunately, even after the Syrian Government has retaken control of many areas of the country, we still lack regular access to areas in need.

We express our grave concern about the humanitarian situation in south-west Syria as well as in the north-western part of the country. The military operations led by Government forces, with the support of Russia, have already displaced thousands of civilians, the majority of whom are moving towards the northern part of the country. As we heard in the briefing, Idlib governorate is struggling with a new significant influx of IDPs, leaving it with the highest total number of displaced persons in Syria.

The humanitarian imperative should be our primary priority. We would like to reiterate our strong call on all parties with influence on the situation on the ground to take all actions necessary to achieve a full cessation of hostilities throughout the Syrian territory in order to avert tragic scenarios such as those we have already witnessed in eastern Ghouta, eastern Aleppo and Dar'a.

Let me emphasize the importance of protecting the most vulnerable groups, especially children, women and religious minorities, who are too often affected by the conflict in Syria.

Let me also stress the need for the protection of refugees. We support the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Syrian people under a United Nations-led framework once conditions allow. In this context, I should like also to express our concern about the so-called Syrian Law No. 10, on property rights. We are deeply worried by its possible significant repercussions on the future return of Syrian IDPs and refugees. That is why we underline the need for the Security Council to remain seized of the matter.

This seventh year of the armed conflict in Syria means that millions of children have known only life in fear. They suffer from malnutrition and are deprived of their fundamental rights, including the rights to food, water, sanitation, education and medical care. The denial of humanitarian access to children has traumatic consequences. There is also a need to accelerate humanitarian mine-action programmes by prioritizing areas to which civilians are returning in order to address the growing number of child victims.

We are very concerned at the impact of the conflict on education. With more than 2 million Syrian children out of school and one third of schools unusable, the conflict has devastated the lives of a generation of young people. The lack of access to education and the trauma experienced by children, including that due to sexual violence, has created a lost generation in Syria, which will affect the future of the country and that of the whole region, undermining prospects for the reconstruction and recovery of a free and democratic Syria.

Therefore, we want to stress the importance of ensuring funding for protection programmes to support children affected by the conflict, as well as quality education for all children, including girls, at all levels. In that regard, we strongly condemn the continued attacks on schools and the use of schools for military purposes. Let me recall that this year's annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) listed 67 verified attacks on schools and education personnel in 2017, most of which were air strikes.

In conclusion, let me stress the necessity of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of the full implementation of the relevant humanitarian resolutions throughout Syria, especially as we again face an increase of violence, this time in the northern part of the country. The adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) was just the beginning of the process. We again call on all stakeholders with influence on the ground to take the necessary steps to ensure that the fighting

stops, the Syrian people are protected and, finally, urgent humanitarian access is provided.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his very detailed briefing. I would also like to thank Special Representative Gamba for her briefing. It was particularly useful to be reminded of the horrific suffering of Syrian children throughout the conflict.

We should all remember that one of the sparks that lit the flame of this conflict was the arrest and detention by Syrian Mukhabarat of schoolchildren from Dar'a simply for posting anti-regime graffiti on a school wall. We should all remember the horrific recruitment and enslavement of children by Da'esh, and we should all remember the appallingly high number of children killed and maimed by indiscriminate aerial bombardment, whether in Aleppo, eastern Ghouta or other areas, by the Syrian regime and its allies.

I was particularly struck by Ms. Gamba's conclusion that most of the killing and maiming of children has been attributed to the Syrian Government and pro-Government forces. I would strongly echo her call on the parties for three things: to respect international humanitarian law, to comply with obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol and to allow access for civilian child protection actors to children deprived of liberty for their association with armed groups. Given the presence of the representative of the Syrian Government in this Chamber today, I would hope that in his statement he could commit his Government to fulfilling those three requests that she made.

We join the United States and others in condemning the appalling terrorists attack claimed by Da'esh in Al-Suwayda province on 25 July, which killed many innocent civilians. Such callous disregard for human life is horrifying. Our ministers have expressed their condolences to the families of the victims and reaffirmed our commitment to peace in Syria and Da'esh's lasting defeat.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador has already reminded us that in February, all Council members voted in favour of resolution 2401 (2018) whereby we demanded a cessation of hostilities and unimpeded humanitarian access. It is to our deep regret that the Syrian authorities have made no effort to abide by the terms of that resolution or, indeed, those of the de-escalation agreement reached between Russia and the United States last year.

We, like others, are deeply concerned about the Russian-backed offensive by the Al-Assad regime into the de-escalation area in south-west Syria. Over the past month, that offensive has had a devastating impact on civilians living in the area, with more than a quarter of a million civilians displaced. UNICEF has reported that approximately half of all those who have fled the recent wave of violence are children.

People fleeing fighting must have freedom of movement to be able to choose where they go and be allowed to return home once it is safe to do so so that they can reclaim their property and rebuild their lives. They must be protected against regime reprisals and have access to essential supplies and basic services. We expect the regime and Russia to ensure the safety and security of all those in southern Syria, including the safety of humanitarian actors and those active in civil society.

Like the representatives of Peru, the Netherlands and others countries who spoke today, we are extremely concerned about the situation in Idlib, where, as we heard from Staffan de Mistura the other day, close to 3 million civilians are in fear of attacks by the regime and its backers, and more than 50 per cent of the population have been displaced from their homes, in some cases multiple times. The dire humanitarian situation will continue unless real, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access is allowed. We urge Russia and pro-regime forces to comply with de-escalation and remove all obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of humanitarian access to areas that have recently come under regime control. We urge Russia to use its influence to secure rapid and unhindered access to those areas for humanitarian agencies. Such access needs to be sustained rather than one-off token convoys. The delivery of aid also needs to be transparent and subject to appropriate accountability and oversight.

Cross-border aid represents a significant proportion of all United Nations humanitarian deliveries. It is essential that humanitarian assistance be able to reach people throughout Syria through the most direct routes. In that regard, I would like to echo the call made by the representative of France for Russia and Syria to provide the United Nations with the necessary security assurances to continue using the Al-Ramtha crossing from Jordan. This Council has mandated the United

Nations to use the crossing. Resolution 2393 (2017) remains in force and is a key element to ensuring that aid is delivered to those in need.

In concluding, let me say that it is clear from today's briefing that there are several ways in which the Syrian authorities and their allies could improve the humanitarian situation in the country. On that basis, I would like to ask the Syrian authorities and Russia to do three concrete things: first, ensure safe, immediate, unimpeded and sustained access to Quneitra for the United Nations and its humanitarian partners; secondly, ensure safe, immediate, unimpeded and sustained access for the United Nations and its partners to priority areas that have recently changed control, including Douma and the towns of eastern Ghouta, southern Damascus and northern, rural Homs; and thirdly and finally, give the Council assurances — and I hope that we might hear such assurances from the Syrian representative later in this meeting — that humanitarian workers in areas that have recently changed control will be protected and that humanitarian services for the populations in those areas will continue.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefings by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and by Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to whom we reiterate our support for the sensitive work that they are carrying out.

We express our regret that this conflict has lasted for eight years, and we continue to bear witness to the unrelenting siege and violence suffered by the Syrian people, especially those most vulnerable, like children, who in some cases have known only this reality since birth. Sadly, if appropriate measures are not taken, most of them will have to live with persistent psychological trauma. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 13.1 million people remain in need humanitarian assistance, of whom approximately 5.3 million are children. There are approximately 6.1 million internally displaced persons, of whom 2.6 million are children, and some 200,000 of those children live in difficult-to-access areas. We must prevent those figures from growing larger.

We are alarmed by the escalation of violence in south-west Syria and call for a cessation of hostilities in the framework of resolution 2401 (2018). Any increase in tensions must be avoided in order not to further destabilize the region. We also reiterate the importance of safeguarding the lives of thousands of civilians who continue to move into the city of Idlib, including those children and their families who are swelling the numbers of persons internally displaced by of violence. It is essential to avoid any kind of tension or escalation of violence in that area so as to avoid a major tragedy. To that end, the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) is indispensable. In that connection, we highlight the different initiatives that allowed local agreements to be reached to facilitate not only the entry of humanitarian assistance, but also the evacuation of people in need.

The necessary measures must also be taken to prevent the resurgence of terrorist groups and to stop further violence. We strongly condemn the attack on the city of Al-Suwayda, which resulted in more than two hundred deaths, and those responsible for those heinous attacks must be held accountable.

We repudiate all attacks on civilian facilities, and therefore we call on the parties to respect their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including with regard to the protection of civilians, hospitals and educational institutions. We regret that, according to figures from OCHA and UNICEF, more than 2.7 million Syrian children have not attended school since the beginning of the conflict. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724), 104,000 children benefited from essential learning materials and remedial education, and 172,000 children benefited from protection and psychosocial support services.

However, we believe that more must be done for such a vulnerable population. We must do everything we can to get these children back into school. We cannot allow their first lessons in life to be forced displacement or shelter. Measures should also be taken to keep them from being subjected to sexual violence or recruitment.

We highlight the tireless work of the various humanitarian agencies and workers who have put their own lives at risk in providing the humanitarian access that so many need. We note that, according to the latest report, more than 218,000 people in hard-to-reach areas were served, and that a total of 3 million children received care from UNICEF. We also note that more than 1 million children and mothers had access to first aid and that around 293,000 children and pregnant and breastfeeding motners had received nutritional

supplements. We call on the Syrian Government to cooperate in that matter and to coordinate more closely and actively with United Nations agencies and their representatives so that that assistance may continue to increase. That is why visa authorizations are urgently required, as well as authorizations for the entry of convoys, including cross-border convoys.

In addition, we highlight the technical assessment conducted by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and the United Nations Mine Action Service in the city of Raqqa to ensure the clearance of explosive remnants of war. We believe that that is a basic and urgent action that could avoid fatalities and allow the population to return to their daily lives. It would also allow the displaced population and refugees to gradually return to their homes. That return must be safe, dignified, voluntary and informed, as it must be throughout Syria, .

The reduction of violence on the ground must be based on increased confidence-building among the parties involved. Relieving the humanitarian situation of the civilian population, especially the most vulnerable, such as children, must be a priority on the agenda of political dialogue and high-level diplomacy. We reiterate that the only way to resolve this conflict is through an inclusive, dialogue-based and concerted political process, led by the Syrian people and allowing for a peaceful solution.

Finally, we highlight the work that Special Representative Virginia Gamba has been doing on behalf of children in armed conflict and encourage her to continue her important work in coordination with the agencies of the United Nations, Member States, and regional and subregional organizations, in accordance with resolution 2427 (2018). We reiterate the full support of my delegation.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba for their comprehensive and very informative briefings.

While carefully studying the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724), we are also closely following developments on the ground. Kazakhstan is concerned about the humanitarian situation in south-western Syria. There can be no alleviation of the suffering without a political agreement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and other platforms aimed at bringing peace to Syria.

We are also alarmed at the significant increase in the scale, frequency and severity of grave violations affecting children in Syria. Last year was the deadliest for children since the beginning of the conflict, as a result of which 2 million Syrian children became refugees and 2.5 million were internally displaced.

We therefore call on the parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law to reverse the growing number of child victims. Parties need to protect the civilian population and avoid attacking civilian infrastructure, especially schools and health facilities and their personnel. It is equally critical to implement the demining programme to save lives and prevent lifelong injuries. There is also a need for increased support for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children formerly associated with armed groups.

Children have been the most vulnerable and affected victims of this seven-year conflict. Every effort must therefore be made to provide schooling, health care and social services so as not to have a lost generation, as they are the country's richest resource.

Resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions pertaining to cross-border operations and all other methods of delivery are also essential for a needs-based response. It is crucial to ensure safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access for all civilians in need, especially children, if further deterioration of the humanitarian crisis is to be averted. That is particularly vital across conflict lines under circumstances of changed control.

Kazakhstan endorses the Secretary-General's call to ensure that the necessary security guarantees are in place for the continued rapid and unimpeded delivery of assistance, which must be impartial and unbiased in character. Civilians wishing to flee the fighting should be allowed to do so without hindrance and in full dignity and safety, while those wishing to stay need to be protected. We need to ensure accountability and end impunity for those who perpetrate violations.

The humanitarian crisis requires a holistic and comprehensive approach that goes beyond the mere delivery of aid. It is obvious that the military option is not a solution. Kazakhstan therefore assures its full support for the relaunching of the political negotiations

through the Astana Process and its guarantor countries. That in turn would also lead to the mitigation of the humanitarian crisis. A durable solution can be reached only through an inclusive dialogue of all stakeholders, including women and young people.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Gamba for their briefings.

The facts on the ground attest to improvements in the situation in Syria, including on the humanitarian front. With the evacuation of residents of Fo'ah and Kafraya, there are no more besieged areas left in the country. As the risks to safety are being reduced in areas recently liberated from terrorists, the stage is gradually being set for the geographical expansion of humanitarian deliveries. However, there are still major problems with humanitarian access in a number of areas that are not controlled by Damascus, including those occupied by the so-called coalition, in violation of Syria's sovereignty. Thus no significant progress has been seen in the provision of vital supplies for the inhabitants of the Rukban camp, located in a closed zone around the United States Al-Tanf military base. Nor do we see anything in the functioning of this camp that contributes to establishing peace and eradicating terrorism.

We are once again obliged to draw attention to the need to prepare for winding down the cross-border mechanism, which the Security Council introduced as a special measure at a time and in circumstances when it was not possible to conduct humanitarian operations in a number of areas from Syrian territory itself. The situation today is fundamentally different, and it makes no sense to continue to maintain this relic of the past, which infringes on Syrian sovereignty. In addition, the Secretary-General's review does not give us a convincing impression of the effectiveness of United Nations control over cross-border supplies and the distribution of goods in Syria. By its nature the mechanism is discriminatory, since it serves only areas temporarily controlled by armed groups.

Russia continues to provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian side on a daily basis. We regularly present the members of the Security Council with the numbers. More than 2,800 tons of humanitarian cargo have been delivered and more than 86,000 people have been treated by our medics. In the past few years, in cooperation with specialized United Nations bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Russian specialists have provided about 300 humanitarian convoys, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions. We are also carrying out joint humanitarian actions with international partners, a good example of which was the recent delivery of humanitarian supplies to residents of eastern Ghouta mentioned by my French colleague, conducted according to a top-level arrangement between Russia and France, an operation for which Russia provided the transport component. In the past few weeks decisive measures have been taken to eliminate terrorist centres in the southern regions of the country, fully responding to the goals set by the Security Council and in the interests of Syria's immediate neighbours as well as Syria itself. We in Russia have given unfailing attention to the priorities of the regional stakeholders and we maintain intensive contacts with them at various levels.

However, it is still too soon for rosy scenarios. Sadly, it does not lack for moments of tragedy, as my American colleague also mentioned today. We were shocked by the series of terrorist attacks just the other day in Suwayda province whose victims were in the hundreds. The perpetrators of that crime must be severely punished. Where punishing the guilty is concerned, it is crucial to ensure that we have the uncompromising determination of all international stakeholders to fight together and with uniform standards against terrorism in all its forms, as Council resolutions demand.

The implementation of local pacification arrangements is continuing in the areas of Dar'a and Quneitra provinces that have been liberated from terrorists. These were agreed on with the direct participation of specialists from the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides. The militants are given the opportunity to take advantage of the State amnesty, regulate their status and join the efforts to restore peaceful life, and many are making that choice. Those who are unwilling to accept reconciliation leave for the northern regions of the country with their family members.

As we have said many times, and I would like to say it again, the real humanitarian workers, whether doctors, teachers or journalists, have nothing to fear from the central authorities' restoration of control in the liberated territories. Those who should fear for their safety are the people hiding an entirely different activity, designed to destroy the Syrian State and spread extremism and false propaganda, behind a

humanitarian facade. We receive requests for help in evacuating all kinds of activists from south-western Syria and review such appeals based on humanitarian considerations and our capabilities. The standouts in this story are the White Helmets, whom my colleagues have already discussed today, who disguise themselves as an organization for Syria's civil defence and yet have taken part in disgusting acts of provocation, including the use of poisonous substances. Their trademark in the information war against Damascus has become the production of videos in which they have cynically exploited little children. We have already reported on such cases a number of times. We believe that once the White Helmets are kicked out, Syria will become safer, and that once these people have moved to their foreign sponsors in Europe and North America they will eventually stop engaging in provocations and refrain from helping terrorists.

As the situation in much of Syria is normalized, the task of returning refugees and internally displaced persons to their permanent homes is becoming ever more urgent. It will reduce the migration burden on host States, primarily Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and various European countries. The main thing is that all Syrians who want to should be able to return to their homes and take part in the restoration and development of their homeland. This process has already started. The numbers of citizens returning to Syria are already in the thousands. Of course, they need appropriate conditions for their safe and dignified return and placement, and the Syrian authorities are ready to work on providing them. In an official statement on 3 July, the Government of Syria urged its citizens to return home and affirmed its responsibility for their safety and integrity. We note that the appeal was welcomed in various States that have been hosting refugees from Syria during the conflict.

I would like to emphasize that there is no basis for the insinuations that have been made with regard to Law No. 10 have no basis, as the Syrian authorities have continually explained. A whole information campaign has been cooked up accusing Damascus of wanting to expropriate the property of critics of the current Government living abroad. But the law's only and very pertinent objective is regulating the situation related to real estate property rights, which are in a state of chaos thanks to the conflict. It is important to note that the Syrians are not rushing to implement the law and are prepared to continue discussing the details with United Nations experts.

Successfully implementing the plans for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons will require the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders in cooperation with the Syrian authorities. The specialized bodies in the United Nations system should play a major role in this, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The issue will be on the agenda of the tenth international high-level Astana-format meeting, to be held on 30 and 31 July in Sochi. Russia is taking concrete steps to help. The Centre for Refugee Reception, Distribution and Settlement has begun its work in coordination with Damascus with an extensive network of branches at checkpoints in various parts of the country.

In that context, the revival of the Syrian economy, including job creation, is a critical challenge. The war has dealt a severe blow to many sectors of Syrian industry and agriculture and has destroyed homes and infrastructure. There is an acute shortage of construction materials and heavy equipment, which also needs fuel. The education system must be restored, along with the medical field, a source of great pride for the Syrian people before the conflict. The right thing for all international partners to do would be to help the Syrian recovery efforts and refrain from clinging to artificial political dynamics. It is also long past time to lift the unilateral sanctions, whose primary victims are ordinary Syrians, as the United Nations has shown.

I would also like to touch on the issue of humanitarian mine clearance. Our Russian specialists have done tremendous work in sharing their expertise with their Syrian colleagues, and more than 1,200 local sappers have been trained. We spoke about this in detail recently in a special Security Council meeting (see S/PV.8304). We hope that the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Syrian Government and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will be followed up with concrete, practical and non-politicized measures. In Raqqa alone there is a ton of work to be done, and regrettably, months after the terrorist centre there was wiped out, the so-called coalition has not done enough to make the city it destroyed habitable. We would also like to think that our international partners could help UNMAS through dedicated financing for demining projects in Syria and by providing technical support.

In conclusion, I would like to digress from purely humanitarian issues and point out that thanks to Russian specialists, both sappers and archaeologists, the monuments in Palmyra that the terrorists destroyed, which are part of the heritage of all humankind, are being restored. We expect the specialized international bodies, in particular UNESCO, to show genuine interest in this issue.

In a broader sense, it will be important to start talking about Syria's reintegration into the regional trade and economic system. Unblocking a number of internal roadways and border crossings has to be an important prerequisite for strengthening the traditional links between Syria and its partners in the region. That is by far the best way to meet the goal of normalizing relations among the States of the Middle East, and Russia is ready to support it in every way. And, of course, stabilization will also help advance the political settlement process under the auspices of the United Nations, which all members of the Security Council unanimously support.

Mr. Yao Shaojun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Mr. Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for their briefings.

China takes note of the Secretary-General's recent report on cross-border humanitarian relief operations (S/2018/724) and would like to express its grave concerns about the humanitarian situation in the country and the obstacles to humanitarian activities there. We applaud the efforts of United Nations humanitarian agencies and related parties to ease the humanitarian situation in certain parts of Syria. We hope that all Syrian parties will continue to coordinate with United Nations humanitarian relief operations. Given the ongoing conflict in some parts of Syria, we hope that the parties concerned will refrain from harming innocent civilians and work to improve the protection of children affected by the conflict. All Syrian actors must bear in mind their country's future and their people's well-being, abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions and resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations, with a view to easing the humanitarian situation as quickly as possible. In all humanitarian endeavours, it is imperative to adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization and respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. The United Nations and the international community must enhance their communication and coordination with the Syrian Government and provide assistance to all areas in need.

Greater support is needed from the international community to help Syria's neighbours accommodate the large numbers of Syrian refugees. We have noted the progress made in returning Syrians to their homes. The international community must prioritize and actively support Syria's reconstruction, stepping up efforts to clear mines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, minimize accidental casualties among civilians and help refugees and displaced persons return home.

Terrorist groups continue to launch attacks within Syria. We condemn the recent terrorist attack in Suwayda governorate in southern Syria. The international community must enhance cooperation and uphold uniform standards in combating all groups that the Council designates as terrorists.

Any serious improvement of the humanitarian situation in Syria requires greater efforts to promote the political process. The international community should make every effort to endorse the United Nations as the main mediation channel and support Special Envoy de Mistura in facilitating the political process, in accordance with the principle of Syrian ownership and leadership and based on resolution 2254 (2015). It is important to ensure that the Council remains united on the issue and can help to create the conditions conducive to a political settlement. China attaches great importance to the humanitarian situation in Syria. China's President, Xi Jinping recently announced another $600 million in aid to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other countries in support of humanitarian and reconstruction efforts on the ground. We will continue to help Syria and its neighbours affected by the flow of Syrian refugees to the best of our abilities.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would first like to join previous speakers in condemning the recent terrorist attack perpetrated by Da'esh in Suwayda province, which claimed hundreds of lives.

My delegation thanks Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for their briefings.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, the result of a resurgence in the fighting that has claimed many lives, as well as forcing the suspension of United Nations humanitarian aid delivery owing to a lack of security guarantees. We would like to recall here that the cross-border aid authorized by resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2[illegible] (2017) remains a vital element of United Nations humanitarian action in Syria, which has saved many lives and eased the suffering of thousands. While reiterating our condemnation of the military escalation in south-western Syria, Côte d'Ivoire once again calls for strict respect for resolution 2401 (2018), which demands an immediate cessation of hostilities in order to enable the unhindered and safe delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need. I therefore remind parties to the conflict of their obligations, pursuant to international humanitarian law, to protect civilians, social and educational infrastructure such as schools and health facilities, and humanitarian workers. Above all, they must refrain from obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in distress.

My delegation welcomes the agreements on the cessation of hostilities that were reached between Government forces and armed rebel groups at the prompting of the Russian Federation. That truce should allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need under safer conditions. My country also especially welcomes the joint humanitarian operation of the Russian Federation and the French Republic, which, with United Nations assistance, delivered medical assistance and basic necessities to people in eastern Ghouta. At the same time as that operation in eastern Ghouta, it is equally fortunate that nearly 40 Syrian Red Crescent trucks were able to access formerly besieged areas of the southern province of Dar'a to distribute assistance to the people who stayed behind.

Similarly, my delegation welcomes the gradual improvement in the security and health situation in Raqqa, which has enabled some 138,000 civilians to return to their homes since the liberation of the city from the grips of Da'esh in October 2017. My country encourages the international community to continue its efforts so as to respond appropriately to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and, in that regard, thanks the border countries for the multifaceted assistance provided to 5.6 million Syrian refugees.

Côte d'Ivoire, aware of the impact that that influx of refugees can have on the economy and stability of host countries, urges the international community to consider the question of the return of Syrian refugees to their homes of origin with the utmost attention. That return must take place in accordance with current international standards, which prescribe a voluntary and sustainable return of refugees under safe and dignified conditions to enable them to fully contribute to the national reconciliation process and the overall political settlement of the crisis in Syria.

My delegation believes that the international community's efforts to provide a satisfactory humanitarian response to the needs of the Syrian people must be part of the overall framework of our collective efforts to find a political solution to the crisis. Only a credible and inclusive peace process, based on the relevant provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), can provide a definitive solution to the crisis in that country.

With that in mind, my country welcomes the various initiatives aimed at relaunching the inter-Syrian dialogue process and encourages Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the political process in Syria, to take the necessary steps, within the framework of the Geneva process, to set up a committee charged with drafting the new constitution of Syria, as was decided at the Sochi meeting in Russia.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire urges the Syrian parties to embrace dialogue and to advance the political process with a view to achieving a lasting solution to the crisis, in accordance with the road map of resolution 2254 (2015). We commend the Special Envoy's personal commitment to seeking a political settlement to the Syrian crisis and assure him of our full support.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would also like to join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Virginia Gamba for their briefings.

The humanitarian situation in different parts of Syria remains dire due to military operations, including in the south-west. Civilian casualties, destruction of humanitarian facilities and displacement remain alarming, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724) of 20 July explained. We reiterate our call for an end to the hostilities, which are worsening the humanitarian crisis. While we express our appreciation to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to reach millions of Syrians, as stated

by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, it is critical to ensure quality access, in particular in some areas that have seen a change of control, in order to provide aid to all Syrians on the basis of their humanitarian needs. Access challenges — including the curtailment of cross-border operations due to lack of security assurances in south-west Syria, as stated in the most recent report of the Secretary-General — should be addressed so that safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access can be ensured.

Furthermore, the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is indispensable to alleviate the suffering of civilians, including children. While it is known that all Syrians have been suffering because of the ongoing humanitarian tragedy, children have been among the most vulnerable groups. They have been killed, injured and displaced and have experienced enormous emotional, psychological and physical suffering.

We all agree that the future of Syria will be in the hands of today's children. Hence, they should be protected from any violence and be allowed to get humanitarian aid. In that regard, we thank the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for providing children with targeted assistance. However, ultimately it is the restoration of peace that can save and protect Syrian children from their unspeakable agony and allow them to realize their potential.

As we have been repeatedly stressing, ultimately it is a Syrian-led comprehensive political dialogue facilitated by resolution 2254 (2015) that can address the humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

We are meeting once again to discuss a report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724) that clearly outlines how the principles and rules of humanitarian law are repeatedly and systematically violated. International calls for an end to the violence in Syria, for humanitarian access and the protection of civilians are ignored, and the resolutions of this very Council are disregarded. Yet we must continue our efforts to push for a political solution to the conflict and to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. In our response to the plight of the Syrian crisis on children, we should be able to come together.

As we have heard today from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative Gamba, our action is urgently needed. Time is running out for a generation of Syrian children. Syria is the most dangerous conflict-affected country for children. Last year was the deadliest yet, and unthinkably, the plight of Syria's children continues to worsen, with the number of children killed and injured in the first two months of 2018 almost surpassing last year's total. The Council, the parties to the conflict and all Member States listening today must now act to improve the situation of children trapped in the nightmare of the Syrian war.

To that end, I want to highlight four areas of the humanitarian response where we can and must do better. Acting to protect children in Syria today in these four areas will not only improve their lives, but will help build peace in Syria and prevent a relapse into conflict.

First is access. Over 5 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance. Resolution 2427 (2018) calls on all parties to allow and facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access to children, and it condemns unlawful denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians, particularly children, of objects indispensable to their survival. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has reported to us today, and indeed every month, on the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. That is also having far-reaching indirect consequences that are not always understood, but include negative coping mechanisms such as increased child labour, the recruitment of children to armed groups and an increase in child marriage. Aid workers report that 14-year-old girls are mothers to more than one child.

We call on all parties to immediately grant access to all those in need, keeping all options open for the United Nations to reach as many people as possible, including cross-border options,increased United Nations cross-line access, including to areas that have recently changed control, and to protect humanitarian workers so that they can continue to do their job.

Secondly, with regard to education, as we have heard today from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Virginia Gamba, one in three schools in Syria is closed. The result is that over 2 million children are denied their right to education. School should offer a place of stability and safety for children. However, attacks on schools have been systematic and rampant. Last year 67 attacks were reported, most of which inflicted by air strikes. Children who have been

besieged, such as those in eastern Ghouta, have often been robbed of several years of schooling.

Resolution 2427 (2018) again urges all parties to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and strongly condemns attacks on schools. All parties to the conflict must cease all attacks on schools and give all children, including those without civil documentation, access to schools. We call for the deconfliction of schools to be stepped up, particularly in Idlib province. All attacks against schools, in contravention of international humanitarian law, must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. We also call on all of us donors to step up funding for education as part of the emergency response.

The third area is mental health. The stress of war is often too much for adults; the effects on children can be profound and lifelong. Resolution 2427 (2018) stresses the importance of funding mental health and psychosocial programming in humanitarian contexts and ensuring that all affected children receive the support they need. The war in Syria has created a mental health crisis among children, with children exhibiting frequent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Two thirds of children have lost a loved one, had their homes bombed or suffered war-related injuries. The situation is further exacerbated by sexual violence, forced marriages, sexual enslavement and trafficking of both girls and boys. Less than 5 per cent of humanitarian funding in Syria is channelled towards protection, mental health, psychosocial services or education in emergencies. We therefore encourage donors and the humanitarian community to help us change that today.

Fourth is protection. The year 2017 saw the highest number to date of grave violations against children in Syria. The majority of the children killed and injured are victims of air strikes, with systematic attacks against hospitals and medical facilities contributing to the high numbers of child casualties. Many have been separated from their families. Girls in internally displaced person camps are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Children with a perceived association with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or Da'esh have unique protection concerns. Resolution 2427 (2018) emphasizes that children that have been recruited by armed groups should be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law, and it urges a focus on rehabilitation and reintegration for children formerly associated with armed groups. Syria should be no exception.

I reiterate our call on all parties to immediately implement resolution 2401 (2018) and existing de-escalation agreements in Idlib and the south and to fully respect their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. We specifically call on Syria to implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which it has ratified, and to immediately cease committing the six grave violations listed.

Accountability for all violations and abuses against children and others must be ensured. We will not relent in our demands for justice at the international and national levels. We continue to believe that the situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court. Until that time, we support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and other relevant mechanisms in their efforts to bring about justice for crimes committed in Syria. We also call on our humanitarian partners to integrate protection earlier into the first response, and on donors to step up funding to protection efforts. That is particularly urgent in the south.

We will not stop calling for full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, not least with regard to access. Together we must shoulder the responsibility entrusted to us. I want to voice my support for the three very concrete asks made just now by the representative of the United Kingdom. In particular, we are deeply concerned about the safety of humanitarian and medical personnel, civil defence workers, civil society, human rights activists and journalists who are at particular risk of being targeted by the Syrian forces We will follow developments closely until our next meeting, when we will take stock of the implementation of those three requests.

Were it not for the brave and determined efforts of humanitarian, health and child protection workers, the situation of children in Syria would be even worse. I want to commend the United Nations and its partner organizations for all the work that is being done to assist children in Syria. On a monthly basis, UNICEF alone reaches 3 million people in Syria. I hope that today's meeting can help to renew our efforts to help

and protect those children, to avoid losing an entire generation that deserves and needs our support.

I now resume my functions as President of Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I am surprised by the logic of representatives of some delegations who have described the liberation of Syrian territories from terrorist groups by saying that the Syrian Government is continuing to seize territories. The Syrian Army and its allies are liberating territories that were under the control of armed terrorist groups, which for many years had used children, women and the elderly as human shields. I should like to underscore from this seat that the day will come when all the aggressive military forces, without exception, will leave Syrian territory. There will be no one to carry illegal arms against the Syrian people and the Syrian State.

We had hoped to hear a collective reaction from the Security Council to the bloody massacre perpetrated by the terrorist organization Da'esh in the Al-Suwayda city two days ago.

As we are discussing the fifty-third report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724) on the humanitarian situation in Syria, I should like to assure members of the Council once again that the Syrian Government is eager to provide all kinds of humanitarian assistance to all its citizens throughout Syrian territory. That is a duty to which it remains committed. It is also keen on cooperating and coordinating with its humanitarian partners and the United Nations, in compliance with the guiding principles of General Assembly resolution 46/182, on coordinating and strengthening humanitarian aid. The resolution also calls for respect for the sovereignty and independence of States and underlines the role of the State involved to supervise the distribution of humanitarian aid on its territories and the need to respect the principles of neutrality, integrity and non-politicization.

The constitutional and legal duties enshrined in all international instruments, including the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, require the Syrian Government to carry out military operations in order to liberate civilians from the armed terrorist groups that were besieging them and had used them for many years as human shields.

The day before yesterday, we sent out an official letter responding to the content of the fifty-third report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in Syria, and I should like to make the following comments in that regard.

First, day after day, the Syrian State — thanks to its institutions and the support of the Syrian people and with international support from Syria's real friends, who believe in the principles of international law — is making important progress on the ground in liberating Syrian territory from the armed terrorist organizations that were spread among civilians while using them as human shields. They exploited and recruited their children and seized the humanitarian assistance that was sent to them. Those achievements and significant efforts of the Syrian national institutions have ensured support for the Syrian people and the delivery of United Nations humanitarian aid to them.

Secondly, the counter-terrorism operations carried out by the Syrian State are in line with its constitutional mandate and consistent with the principles of international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. For its part, the United Nations should step up its support to the Syrians, in accordance with humanitarian principles, especially in coordinating with the Syrian national institutions, rather than with the so-called local councils, which are in fact unreal entities affiliated with terrorist organizations and secession bodies. The authors of the report have been trying to promote these entities in an unprofessional way, and make up allegations on their important humanitarian role in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Thirdly, contrary to what certain people have advocated, the successful military operations carried out by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies against armed terrorist groups that controlled certain regions classified by the United Nations as besieged or hard-to-reach, in addition to achieving compromises or reconciliation agreements in other regions, have alleviated the suffering of civilians and lowered the number of such regions, while to a great extent facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to them.

Fourthly, the Syrian Arab Republic stresses once again the fact that unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the European Union, the United States and others against the Syrian Arab Republic

significantly hamper our ability to meet the basic needs of the Syrian people and to improve their means of subsistence. We note the latest United Nations report on the negative effects of those measures, which hinder humanitarian efforts at the national and international levels. This is the report of the Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights (A/72/370) and his latest briefing to the International Syria Support Group, in which he underscored the seriousness of the continuation of such measures with regard to the humanitarian situation of Syrians, particularly in terms of health, education, electricity, water and remittances.

Fifthly, the operations led by the Syrian State to liberate Syrians from terrorism in the south of the country have unveiled the true motivations of some parties and Governments that were concerned not about meeting the needs of the Syrians who were displaced to the Syrian border with Jordan, but rather about protecting the armed terrorist groups in the region, particularly members of the White Helmets terrorist organization. This terrorist organization was and continues to be the logistical and operational hand of the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida. Those terrorist organizations carry out attacks against Syrians and destabilize Syria and the region. The White Helmets, under orders from their sponsors, fabricate insidious information and falsify evidence to mislead the international public opinion with regard to Syria's use of chemical weapons with the aim of justifying aggressive action against Syria by certain permanent members of the Security Council.

My country stresses that the humanitarian system of the United Nations must make serious efforts to regain the confidence of the Syrian Government through a new approach to responding to the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, based on the principles of objectivity, transparency and impartiality. However, that cannot happen if a shadow continues to be cast on the achievements of the Syrian State and its efforts to meet the needs of its people, and if a blind eye continues to be turned to certain States that support terrorists in Syria and exploit the humanitarian situation for their narrow political agendas.

My country's delegation listened carefully to the briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. My delegation had sent an official response on the annual report contained in document S/2018/465. We confirm once again that the accusations made during the briefing against the Syrian Government totally and deliberately ignored the information that the Syrian Government has provided to the Secretariat, as well as the fact that the suffering of Syrian children is the result of the practices of armed terrorist groups.

The briefing and the report of the Special Representative are predicated on a false premise based on incredible information provided by suspicious sources linked to the armed terrorist groups. All the allegations made are refuted by the testimony of civilians protected by the Syrian Arab Army after having been evacuated from the areas under the control of armed terrorist groups for many years. Their testimony tells about injustice, exploitation and starvation inflicted on civilians and their children by those groups, whose crimes do not spare women, children or the elderly.

The Syrian Government has provided the Office of the Special Representative with documented information on child recruitment by armed terrorist groups. We deny and totally reject what is stated in the report and characterized as proof of recruitment of children by the Syrian Government. If that were true, why have we not received any detailed information on that issue despite our repeated requests?

The Syrian Government asks the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-general to launch an investigation into the fate of the children who were kidnapped following the terrorist bombing that targeted buses meant for the evacuation of civilians leaving the villages of Fo'ah and Kafraya in the Al-Rashidin area of Aleppo province on 15 April. According to the information held by the Syrian Government, 32 of these kidnapped children are currently at a care refuge called DAR RAF in the Reyhanli region of southern Turkey, while the rest of the kidnapped children are in the Atma refugee camp.

Finally, I want to comment on the allegations concerning Law No. 10. I would like to inform the Council that two days ago, my delegation sent a letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council in response to the false and deceptive allegations regarding the nature of this Law and its ends. My delegation's letter clearly defines the Law and explains its legal nature, which is to protect properties. We reject all allegations claiming that the objective of the Law is to confiscate properties.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.